



September 2, 2016

The Honorable David E. Rutledge
S-988 House Office Building
P.O. Box 30014
Lansing, MI 48909-7514

Dear Representative Rutledge:

Thank you so much for your hard work and leadership. We are fortunate to have you representing our community.

I am writing to ask for your support of Senate Bill 239 by voting for the bill in the House Local Government Committee, on the House floor, and by encouraging your colleagues to do the same. The bill has already passed the Senate with overwhelming, bipartisan vote. It is our understanding that a hearing on the bill is scheduled for September 7, 2016 before your committee.

I wholeheartedly support SB 239 because it would prohibit local units of government from arbitrarily creating ordinances that seek to prevent ownership of certain animals, not based on behavior, but simply on what the dog looks like. Such laws make it very difficult for us to adopt out wonderful homeless dogs to loving families. (I have attached a blog I wrote on bans on pit bulls that highlight the many problems with such laws.)

Opponents will tell you that Senate Bill 239 eliminates local control. The truth is that local units of government have, and should, work to pass ordinances that hold the owner of any pet responsible for the conduct of that pet – *regardless of breed*.

Breed bans at the local level are ineffective and distract from where true attention and resources should be focused, on the enforcement of laws and ordinances that hold pet owners accountable for the pet's behavior – *regardless of breed*.

Thank you so much for your representation, and again – please support SB 239.

Gratefully yours,

Tanya Hilgendorf
President and CEO
Humane Society of Huron Valley

Why breeds bans don't make sense.
By Tanya Hilgendorf

Without even getting into the messy muck of debate about DNA and what actually is a "pit bull", I can say without hesitation that breed bans are senseless. A sweeping city-wide or housing-wide ban on a type of dog, based on sensational new stories about another dog of ***possibly*** the same breed, are the epitome of prejudice and discrimination – to judge and treat one because of the actions of another. Not much different than banning people from a community based on skin color.

Dogs can be dangerous. The bigger they are the more harm they can do. This was definitely the case with my latest German Shepherd – the love of my life. If you threatened me on the street while I was walking him and I let go of his leash, he would have caused serious bodily injury. So, yes, they are a strong, often protective, breed that can be dangerous if not properly managed. But they also sniff out bombs, drug traffickers and lost people. True heroes.

The real problems with pit bull type dogs are twofold. One, their breeding and ownership skyrocketed over the last few decades, largely in low income communities where they were used for dog fighting, protection, breeding and companionship. Two, they are used in sensational fear-based media stories either on their viciousness or for dog fighting.

So, for many people, the first they have ever heard of a pit bull is when one is in the headlines. My mother has never even met a pit bull. But she is terrified of them. And, honestly, why wouldn't she be based on what she sees in the news?

The recent incident in Augusta Township involving a pit bull attacking a child left home alone had 5 different stories written just in MLive alone. They all carried nearly the same exact facts. The only difference was the headlines that baited people to click.

That was a very bad incident and I have great empathy for the child involved. But dog bites happen every day with many different breeds. I can tell you there were no headlines about the schnauzer poodle mix that put 17 stitches in my 10-year-old face.

Another recent story in Detroit about "pit bull" that killed a 71 year old woman got vast media attention. A tragedy for sure. **But the dogs weren't actually pit bulls** and there were several large unsterilized dogs in the home. (The [CDC's study](#) on dog bites concluded that unneutered dogs are more likely to bite than neutered ones.) The error was pointed out to the media sources. Yet there was not a single a retraction anywhere.

I don't mean to minimize harm caused by a dog. I take public safety very seriously and am ultimately responsible for the unhappy task of making sure dangerous dogs don't leave our shelter. But a dog is a dog. Each one is different. Breed alone does not

determine dangerousness. Ownership does. Dogs are a large responsibility and they require training and loving care. Unless there is some physical ailment, dogs don't go from loving to dangerous out of the blue. If a person has acquired a dog that has problems with aggression, then it is up to that owner to do something about it. And when owners don't, most every community has dangerous dog laws already on the books to address.

It is also up to owners who acquire puppies to properly train and socialize them; to give them a life that does not make them fearful and reactive. Happy, healthy dogs are made. Just. Like. Humans.

Because news stories tend to only highlight and amplify fears -- explaining tragedy in ways that are easily understood, but often entirely wrong -- most people do not understand the cruelty that so many pit bull type dogs suffer. They are the number one type dog that shows up abused and homeless in animal shelters. We, here at HSHV, commonly see them beaten, abandoned, chained up, fought and starved. Bred accidentally or by backyard breeders (who certainly are not following breeding standards that would make most "pit bulls" much more than mutts) and sold to whoever has fifty bucks to spare. They are commonly weaned from their mothers at just two or three weeks of age -- way too early. Problems with pit bull type dogs are 100% about problems in human society -- poverty, apathy, ignorance, and violence.

And yet still the majority of pit bull type dogs we get are sweet goofy dogs desperate for love.

That is the real and amazing story of pit bulls. They forgive.

We struggle to get wonderful homeless dogs adopted because of media-hyped stereotypes and resulting bans that won't let people take home a dog based solely on looks. The story of Diggy perfectly exemplified this fact. A sweet dog needing a home. An adoring owner able to give him one. A silly community ban that said that dogs that look like Diggy don't belong <http://abcnews.go.com/US/smiley-dog-lose-forever-home-due-pit-bull/story?id=39780000>

Breed bans simply punish innocent animals and good owners. Communities are much better served by focusing on responsible, compassionate ownership.